



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Office, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804-3099
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November 14, 2003

To: Governor's Office, Attn: Todd O'Hair, POB 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, POB 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, POB 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
*Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, POB 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
Website, Commission Secretary, Division Secretaries, Regional Office Managers, Lands, Legal
*State Historic Preservation Office, POB 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
*MT State Library, POB 201800, Helena, MT 59620-1800
Jim Jensen, MT Environmental Information Center, POB 1184, Helena, MT 59624-1184
Montana Wildlife Federation, Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624-1175
George Ochenski, POB 689, Helena, MT 59624-0689
Missoula County Commissioners, 200 W. Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802-4292
Missoula Historic Preservation, Phillip Maechling, 435 Ryman, Missoula, MT 59802-4292
Steve Bryant, BBC Trout Unlimited, 1830 Ronald, Missoula, MT 59801
Blackfoot Recreational Steering Committee:
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Spencer Bradford, P.O. Box 8841, Missoula, MT 59807
Hank Goetz, Lubrecht Forest Box 10, Greenough, MT 59823
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John Perry, P.O. Box 20080, Missoula, MT 59801
Dudley Improta, Campus Recreation, U of M, Missoula, MT 59812
Jack Mulcare, 47483 Hwy 200, Greenough, MT 59823
Deb Morvac, 923 Locust, Missoula, MT 59802
Mark Wright, P.O. Box 1193, Bonner, MT 59823
Bob Raney, 212 S. 6, Livingston, MT 59047
Montana Natural History Center, POB 8514, Missoula, MT 59807-8514
Montana State Park Association, POB 699, Billings, MT 59103-0699
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Park Foundation, POB 728, Libby, MT 59923-0728
Senator Vicki Cocchiarella, 535 Livingston Ave., Missoula, MT 59801-8003
Senator Jon Ellingson, 430 Ryman, Missoula, MT 59802-4249
Senator Carolyn Squires, 2111 S. 10th Street W., Missoula, MT 59801-3412
Senator Dale Mahlum, 10955 Hwy 93 N, Missoula, MT 59808-9227
Representative Doug Mood, P.O. Box 42, Seeley Lake, MT 59868-0042
Representative Rossalie Buzzas, 233 University Ave., Missoula, MT 59801-4351
Representative Gail Gutsche, 1530 Cooper, Missoula, MT 59802-2220
Representative Tom Facey, 418 Plymouth, Missoula, MT 59801-4133
Representative Nancy Rice Fritz, 1817 Daniel, Missoula, MT 59802-4926
Chris Heggem, Senator Conrad Burns, 187 Dirksen Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510
Jim Foley, Senator Max Baucus, 511 N. Higgins, Ste. 102, Missoula, MT 59802
Congressman Dennis Rehberg, 516 Cannon HOB, Washington, DC 20515-2601
Mark Baumler, Montana Historical Society, Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
Clint Blackwood, MT Lewis & Clark Bicent Commission, POB 201203, Helena, MT 59620-1203
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, POB 924, Helena, MT 59624-0924
Mike Johnston, Montana River Guides, 210 Red Fox Rd, Lolo, MT 59847
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Bruce Hall, Bonner Development Group, 7676 E. Hwy 200, Miltown, MT 59851
Friends of Two Rivers, PO Box 376, Milltown, MT 59851.
Blackfoot Challenge, P.O. Box 563, Helena, MT 59624

Nancy Anderson, Bureau of Land Management, 3255 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804
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*Mailed electronically

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Draft Environmental Assessment pertaining to two additional Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Fishing Access Sites to the Blackfoot River system is submitted for your consideration. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) proposes to discharge a highway easement on a 6-acre tract known as Weigh Station, after which FWP would purchase this tract for \$200,000 from the owner, Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P., using fishing license fees and Land and Water Conservation federal aid funds. FWP also proposes to accept, at no charge, the transfer and assignment of an easement from MDT on an 8-acre tract known as Angevine Park.

Review copies of this draft document are available at the Region Two Headquarters of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804. An electronic version is available at www.fwp.state.mt.us. All questions and comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, December 16, 2003. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at 542-5517. All comments may be sent to the undersigned.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Lee Bastian
Regional Park Manager

**Draft
Environmental Assessment**

**Lower Blackfoot Fishing Access Site
Acquisitions
- Weigh Station and Angevine Park -**

November 2003



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

***Lower Blackfoot Fishing Access Site Acquisitions
- Weigh Station and Angevine Park -
Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST***

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks to acquire two tracts along the lower Blackfoot River to include in the Fishing Access Site program:

A. Montana Department of Transportation to discharge highway easement assigned to approximately 6 acres, referred to as Weigh Station;

B. Purchase Weigh Station tract by fee title from Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P. using fishing license fees and Land and Water Conservation Fund federal aid;

C. Accept no fee transfer and assignment of an easement interest encompassing approximately 8 acres at Angevine Park from the Montana Department of Transportation; easement allows use of tract for only highway improvements, parking sites, roadway campgrounds and recreational areas.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) undertakes this action by authority of MCA 23-1-102, defining FWP powers and duties regarding the acquisition of lands by fee or donation as state historical sites and recreation areas. The department may cooperate with other federal, state or local agencies to acquire, plan, establish, and maintain parks as authorized by MCA 23-1-107.

FWP is authorized by Section 87-1-209 to acquire lands by purchase, gift, or other agreement, or acquire easements upon lands or waters for certain purposes, including public fishing and outdoor recreation. The FWP Commission granted preliminary approval on the conceptual proposed project in 2000. The proposed project is contingent upon the final consent of the Commission and the approval of the Montana Board of Land Commissioners, since the acquisition involves more than \$100,000 in value.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (LWCF) established a federal grants program that encourages partnerships between national, state and local governments. A grant application will be submitted to the National Park Service (NPS) to use these funds in a 50% federal match to 50% state/private value basis to acquire the subject properties. The project is contingent upon NPS approval.

Section 23-1-110 MCA, or House Bill 495, and the guidelines established in 12.8.604 (ARM) (1) relate to changes in state park and fishing access site features or use patterns. The proposed acquisition will not change site features nor historical use; therefore, Section 23-1-110 MCA is not initiated by the proposed fishing access site acquisition. See Attachment A.

3. **Name of project:** Lower Blackfoot Fishing Access Site Acquisitions – Weigh Station and Angevine Park

4. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency): **Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is the project sponsor.**

5. **If applicable:**

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: not applicable

Estimated Completion Date: prior to **April 2004**

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): not applicable

6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):

Weigh Station

This 6-acre tract is located northeast of Bonner, approximately ½ mile from the Stimson Lumber Mill on State Highway 200. Weigh Station is at Blackfoot River mile 2.0 and is the lowest public river access point to take out a boat above the Stimson Mill complex and diversion dam.

The legal description of the Weigh Station tract is: Township 13 North, Range 18 West, Missoula County, Montana; portions of Government Lot 1 of Section 15 and Government Lot 1 of Section 22 lying northwesterly of the centerline of State Highway No. 200 and easterly of the easterly low water mark of the Blackfoot River; approximately 6 acres in size. Tract elevation is approximately 3400 feet above sea level.

Angevine Park

This 8-acre tract is located approximately six miles east of Bonner just past the Wisherd Bridge on State Highway 200. Angevine Park is at river mile 8.9 from the mouth of the Blackfoot River.

The legal description of Angevine Park is: Township 13 North, Range 17 West, Missoula County, Montana; portion of the N2SW4 and of the SW4SW4 of Section 9 lying northwesterly of the northwest low water mark of the Blackfoot River and southeasterly of the centerline of State Highway 200. Tract elevation is approximately 3400 feet

Map showing proposed sites in relation to other FAS on lower Blackfoot River. Base map source by permission: 10,000 Waves web page at www.10000waves.com



above sea level.

Both tracts are long and irregular in shape, including about 2000 feet of river frontage each.

7. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>	
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	
<u>3</u>			
Residential		<u>0</u>	
Industrial		<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:
		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation		<u>11</u>	Dry cropland
<u>0</u>			
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

8. **Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.**

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
none	

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>	
FWP (Fishing Access Site Acquisition or license funds)	50%	\$100,000
Federal Land & Water Conservation Fund	50%	\$100,000
Total cost to purchase Weigh Station by fee title	100%	\$200,000

Total cost to accept easement transfer at Angevine Park \$0

Funding is contingent upon approval by the FWP Commission, Montana State Land Board and the National Park Service

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
FWP Commission	approval of acquisition
Montana State Land Board	approval of acquisition over \$100,000 value
National Park Service	administrator of LWCF funds; grant approval
Missoula County and land division	approval of Weigh Station survey

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Purpose

The purpose of the proposed acquisitions are to maintain and improve public access along the Blackfoot River. The lower Blackfoot River is a very popular river for float and bank angling, as well as a variety of recreational uses including floating, swimming, walking, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. According to an FWP survey conducted in 2002, Reach 6 (Johnsrud Park Fishing Access Site to Bonner, Montana) of the Blackfoot River received 38,118 visitor days. This is the most frequently used reach of the Blackfoot River (2002 *Blackfoot River Use Estimation Study*). Both, Weigh Station and Angevine Park are within this Reach 6 of the lower Blackfoot River.

Proposed Actions

It is proposed that FWP purchase the 6-acre tract known as the old Weigh Station, from Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P. The purchase price of \$200,000 represents the appraised value as of September 10, 2002. Discharge of the highway easement at Weigh Station is an action to which the owner, Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P., and Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) previously agreed. FWP would not take title to the tract until this easement is discharged.

In addition, FWP would receive a highway easement transferred from the MDT on an 8-acre tract known as Angevine Park and previously used as a highway rest stop. No fees would be charged for this transaction other than associated recording costs. Use of this tract is restricted by the original easement granted by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company to the State of Montana through its Department of Highways in 1944 for highway improvements, **parking sites, camping and recreation**. Plum Creek Timberlands now owns the underlying fee ownership of this tract and would retain the right to remove timber.

Project and Site Descriptions

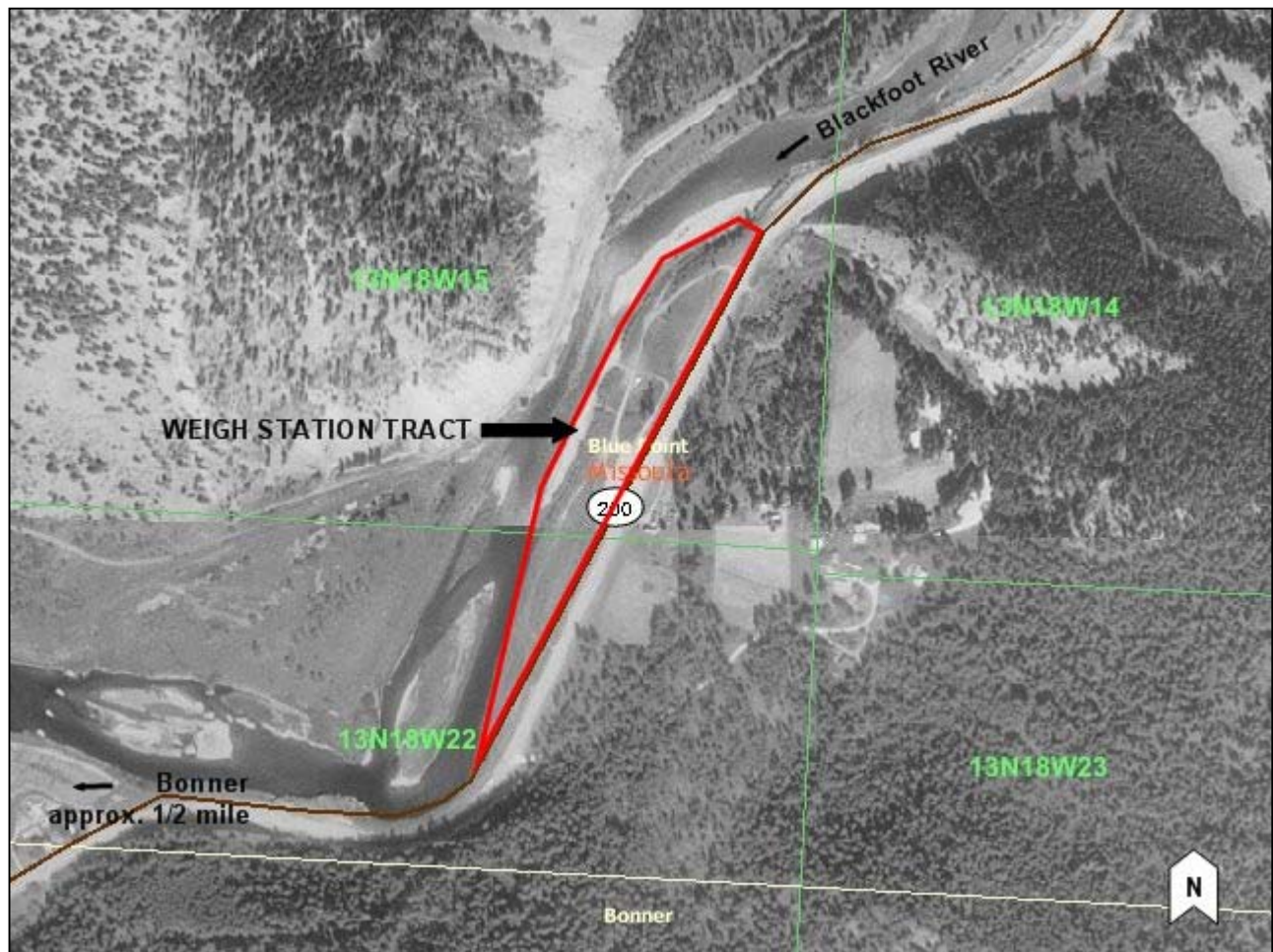
Both tracts have been used by the public for decades, as if they were owned by a public agency, due to their historical easements and assigned use, development, and location adjacent to the State Highway 200. FWP proposes to incorporate these tracts into the Fishing Access Site (FAS) program to allow continued day use recreational opportunities.

The project tracts are located less than 12 miles east of Missoula and are easily accessible from Interstate 90 and Highway 200. Missoula is the primary service and cultural center for the area, including the University of Montana, which is also a major contributor to the local economy. Missoula is the county seat for Missoula County, which has a population of 95,802 according to the 2000 census. This is the second largest county in the state; the City of Missoula also ranks as the second largest urban area in the state. Missoula has grown by nearly 33% since 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau at ceic.commerce.state.mt.us). Recent developments in the land market over the past ten to twenty years have increased

the number and influence of alternative land users and property uses. Much of the attraction to the areas is related to natural resource features, including public lands and an abundance of water resources. The Blackfoot River also receives use from residents of Helena, Butte and Great Falls, all less than 170 miles to the north and east.

Weigh Station

Plum Creek Timberlands has expressed a desire to dispose of Weigh Station and has offered it for purchase by FWP in order that it may be continue to be used by the public for river access. The company is willing to accept the appraised value from September 2002, in which the appraisal indicated that the highest and best use for the tract would be as recreational homesites. As per the trends of private ownership in Montana, it is probable that the public would no longer be allowed to access the Blackfoot River at this location if this property were sold for residential or commercial development.



Weigh Station aerial photo depicting approximate boundaries (6 acres) of proposed acquisition between Highway 200 and the Blackfoot River. (Base photo source: Montana Natural Resources Information Service Topofinder II)

This tract is long, narrow, flat grassland, and is bordered by Highway 200 throughout its length. It is approximately 2000' long and 200' wide at its extremes between the river and the highway with several tiers traversing the length of the tract. The tract was used as a weigh station at one time; however, no buildings or other structures exist today. A portion of the property lies inside the 100 year floodplain. Soils consist of *Shooflin Silt Loam*, which are well drained soils.

Weigh Station is not zoned, nor are there any restrictions in use. A 24' approach from Highway 200 is granted by an memorandum of agreement between MDT and Plum Creek Timberlands near the middle of the property. The property does have a heavily used gravel road entering the tract and large level area used for parking. A pioneered dirt road accesses the river from the parking area. The river bank is accessible for nearly the entire length of the property.

This is the last public access point on the Blackfoot River before it enters the Clark Fork River. The nearest access point upstream is Marco Flats, about two miles east.

Angevine Park

MDT has agreed to transfer and assign its easement at Angevine Park to FWP, at no cost, in order to maintain the recreational opportunities afforded to Montanans and visitors along the Blackfoot River. MDT is ready to decommission Angevine Park since this tract is no longer necessary to provide highway services. MDT no longer wishes to manage the tract for recreation purposes as outlined and required in the 1944 grant of easement from the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. If no state agency were to manage Angevine Park for the intended purposes, the easement would be extinguished and full ownership rights would revert to the underlying fee owner, which presently is Plum Creek Timberlands. The agencies and Plum Creek Timberlands are willing to cooperate in an effort to provide continued recreational and angling opportunities for the good of the general public.

Angevine Park is predominately scattered timberland (Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine) with some open grassy park areas. It is long and irregular in shape, measuring about 1900' long by 300' wide at its maximum between the river and the highway. The tract is generally level with steep banks to the river. A small portion of the tract is located within the 100 year floodplain, but the majority of the tract is on the upper bench outside of the designated floodplain.

Angevine Park is not zoned. Restrictions in use include an easement originally granted by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company to the State of Montana (Dept. of Highways) which severely limits the use of the land for anything other than timber harvest. Some timber was harvested several years ago and presently the tract has a low volume of timber. MDT's right-of-way easement on this tract restricts land uses to "highway purposes, parking sites, roadway campgrounds, and recreational areas along the state highways...and shall be forever known and designated as Angevine Park..." At the time that this easement was placed on the tract, the Parks Division was housed within the MDT and therefore this agency managed many of the State's recreation sites. Since 1965, when the Parks Division was moved to the Fish and Game Department, recreation site management has shifted to the agency now known as FWP, which would hold this easement if the proposed action is completed.

The tract was historically used in conjunction with a rest area, though no buildings are currently on the tract other than an old latrine. Two entrances access the tract from Highway 200 at either end. These roads are paved, as is the parking lot between the two entrances. Wooden barriers line the roads and parking area to confine vehicles to established roads. The river is accessible the entire length of the tract, however, the banks are steep in some stretches.

The closest public access point downstream of Angevine Park is about 3 miles at Marco Flats FAS. This site is signed and has access to the river by trail. Upstream access is available about 2 ½ miles east at K. Ross Toole FAS, an unsigned and unimproved site.



Angevine Park tract aerial photo depicting approximate boundaries (8 acres) of proposed acquisition between Highway 200 and the Blackfoot River. (Base photo source: Montana Natural Resources Information Service Topofinder II)

A. Scope of Work

Upon acquisition, FWP would erect approach signs along Highway 200 (subject to MDT approval) and site identification and regulation signs. FWP would apply the Region 2 Weed

Management Plan to control weeds (primarily knapweed) at both of these tracts. Any additional development such as road improvements or obliteration, road barriers, or latrine installation, would be subject to a separate environmental review and available funding.

Maintenance costs for the two tracts are estimated to total about \$700 annually, primarily used for weed control and minor sign replacement/repair. FTE needed to maintain the tracts, pick up litter, and repair vandalism is estimated at 0.03 annually. Maintenance and operations funds will come from the FWP Region 2 Fishing Access Site Maintenance Budget. An existing Fishing Access Site Caretaker position would be able to maintain these tracts as part of an existing route.

B. Type of Outdoor Recreation Provided

The purpose and benefit of the proposed acquisitions is to maintain and improve angling and recreational opportunities to western and central Montana residents and out-of-state visitors coming to the Blackfoot area. The Blackfoot River offers opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities and people of all ages, abilities and interests.

The Blackfoot River is nationally renowned for its first class fishery. The Blackfoot River received national attention in the Robert Redford movie *A River Runs Through It*. Anglers commonly catch rainbow trout, brown trout, mountain whitefish, and less frequently, northern pike. The river contains a population of bull trout, though it is illegal to intentionally fish for bull trout due to their U.S. Fish and Wildlife status as a threatened species.

According to an FWP survey conducted in 1999, float and bank fishing composed of 57% of the river use. The remaining 43% of the recreational use is composed of activities such as: rafting, inner tubing, canoeing, swimming, picnicking, kayaking, hiking, wildlife watching. The FWP survey conducted in 2002 showed float fishing received medium to medium high use levels and bank/wade angling to receive medium high to high use. Floating, picnicking, inner-tubing, swimming all received high use, camping, medium low to medium use, hiking, medium high, and wildlife viewing received medium high to high use levels.

The river is limited to nonmotorized use only. The proposed tracts provide good parking and river access for hand launching a variety of boats and ideal floating distances for short fishing or recreational trips. Though summer is considered the peak season, float distances are ideal for short spring trips from March through April and fall trips, October through November. These shoulder seasons often offer moderate weather and less crowded conditions for local area recreationists.

Weigh Station also is a key component in the Bonner Riverfront Park project, which will connect Bonner and the Blackfoot River to Missoula via a linear water park. The EPA has recommended that the Milltown Dam and river impediments associated with the Stimson Mill operation be removed in the future. Weigh Station is, and could be in the future, a key point on the lower Blackfoot and the Clark Fork River for floater and angler access.

C. How the Project Meets Outdoor Recreation Needs

The Blackfoot Recreation Management Direction was written in 2000 and it was assumed that the subject tracts would remain open for public use. The management direction recommended that these tracts be designated as access sites and brought under routine

management and enforcement. The loss of these sites to public access would result in increased use and overuse at the remaining sites. Replacement tracts are not available.

The 2-3 mile floating distance between the four publicly used sites on the lower Blackfoot River provides a unique opportunity for short float trips. This length of trip and the proximity to Missoula is ideal for a variety of uses: angling when time is limited, such as after work when weather is often calm and cool and fishing is prime; testing watercraft and handling skills prior to bigger river runs; family floats with young children.

The volume of river frontage available at these tracts is a large attribute in dispersing day use within these tracts. Hot summer days draws large numbers of visitors wanting to cool off in the river. Weigh Station is the first public access people encounter when exiting Interstate 90, and it receives a lot of shoreline and river wading/swimming use. The existing road access at the tracts minimizes the costs to FWP to make these tracts useable and to allow heavy use with limited environmental impacts.

These tracts provide a wide variety of water-based recreation opportunities, which is in high demand. The FWP Region 2 Recreation Steering Committee has recommended that the upper reaches of the river be carefully managed in order to keep a more primitive river experience in tact. This would allow the lower reaches to continue accommodating the heavier use. Thus, these lower Blackfoot sites are critical to the FAS program in providing adequate and continued river access.

The subject tracts offer a multitude of active recreation activities including fishing, hiking, floating, inner tubing, canoeing, swimming, and kayaking. Passive recreational activities are also available at the tracts such as picnicking, wildlife watching, resting and relaxation. Signs posted to identify the tracts along Highway 200 will aid anglers and recreationists in finding public access.

The Blackfoot River attracts people from the entire nation. Acquiring Angevine Park and Weigh Station will retain the ability for tourists to access this river, especially with the proximity of Weigh Station to Interstate 90.

These recreation opportunities could be lost if FWP does not acquire access to the subject tracts. Bonner area tourism could drop as the regional public learned of fewer access sites and more crowding occurs on the remaining public access sites. As a result of crowding, user conflicts on the river and the remaining access sites could increase if Weigh Station and Angevine Park are closed to public use. These issues could discourage tourism to this river area.

D. Target Population the Project Will Serve

This project targets a wide spectrum of anglers and recreationists. Because of the fame of the Blackfoot River, the project will serve foreign visitors, U.S. citizens, tourists, regional and local residents. Approximately 78% of the Blackfoot River users are Montana residents. Most originate from the Missoula Valley, but it is common for people to come from Butte, Helena and Great Falls areas, as well.

A wide spectrum of the population would benefit from the proposed public access acquisitions for the variety of other activities available: swim, wade, picnic, watch wildlife, relax, float in rafts, canoes, kayaks or inner tubes. The latter activities are popular with the local high school and college students. Families will visit for a day on the shoreline to cool off and relax. Young adults will float between access points to test new watercraft or paddling skills. Travelers will stop for a rest at either of the project tracts to stretch, enjoy the scenery, or fish.

All ages can participate in quality trout fishing either by boat or from the bank, using fly rods or spinning equipment. It is common for business workers, students and government workers and families to float or wade the lower Blackfoot after work because of the short float distances, proximity to Missoula, evening cool temperatures, blue ribbon fishing and beautiful scenery.

E. ADA Compliance

Angevine Park is easily accessible by car due to its paved road and parking system; however, access to the river would be considered difficult. Weigh Station is accessible by car immediately off Highway 200. Due to its level and packed gravel features near the highway, the parking facilities are moderately accessible as identified by FWP accessibility guidelines and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. Weigh Station has stretches with gradual river banks and a pioneered gravel boat ramp; these features make it difficult for people with disabilities to reach the river bank.

F. Use Season and Hours of Operation

These tracts would be managed for day use only, with hours of operation to be established. Camping would not be allowed. Peak use occurs during three hot summer months between Memorial Day and Labor Day attracting visitors for a large variety of other recreational activities. Shoulder months extend the use season from March to November when visitors often have moderate weather and less crowded conditions. Angevine Park has been gated and closed to visitors in the winter under MDT management. Winter maintenance costs may result in similar management by FWP.

Weigh Station is used for a month or two in the fall for collecting wildlife data as hunters return to the Missoula area from the Blackfoot Drainage. This data has been collected at this location for over 40 years and provides a wealth of information because of its continuity.

Community Recreation Survey and Project Need

The *2002 Blackfoot River Use Estimation Final Report* by FWP helped to compare sites in the Lower Blackfoot (Reach #6). Results of the study give information regarding activity type, proportionate activity levels, residency, and reaches for the entire 132 mile long river corridor. Of the seven reaches sampled, Reach #6 (from Johnsrud Park FAS at river mile 13.3 to the mouth at the Clark Fork River) had the highest and most diverse use on the entire river. Weigh Station was listed as having moderate importance (use level rating of 3 out of 5) in that it is the last access point to take out a boat above the Stimson Mill Complex. Angevine Park was rated as an important site (use level rating 4 out of 5) within Reach #6 along with the existing K. Ross Toole FAS (FWP site); Johnsrud Park FAS was the only site in this reach given the highest rating of 5). Of the seven reaches, this reach of the Blackfoot River had the highest general use pattern for floating (not for the purpose of angling) by Montana residents and for picnicking. This reach and the reach immediately above received the highest use for inner-tubing and swimming/wading.

The Recreational Use of the Blackfoot River Recreation Corridor (Corrick Riverbend to Johnsrud Park) completed by FWP in December 1992 identified the trend in declining use of the river for angling purposes since 1976, partly due to a decline in trout populations. Since then, trout populations have been rebounding because of river habitat projects and tighter fishing regulations on the Blackfoot River. This survey also indicated a greater interest in recreational floating, swimming and wildlife viewing, for which the lower Blackfoot River reach provides access.

The subject tracts have been open to the public for close to 20 years, through the kind public-use philosophy of Plum Creek Timberlands and their predecessor, Champion. It is very probable that the public is not aware that Weigh Station and Angevine Park are owned by a private corporation. If FWP is unable to acquire these tracts to retain public access and they are closed to public use, a significant amount of public outcry from Missoula area anglers and recreationists would be expected.

Because these tracts are located in a rapidly growing area less than 12 miles from Montana's second largest population centers and large university, outdoor recreation opportunities are important to community members. Residential expansion and rural homesite purchases over the last ten to twenty years make it difficult to find new access points, especially along rivers close to urban centers. Public land and river access is an important component to the quality of life and a large reason many people live in Montana, and specifically settle in western Montana.

In the mid 1990's, FWP Region 2 held six scoping meetings across western and central Montana to help develop the Blackfoot River Recreation Management Direction. One of the recommendations from this document was for FWP to form a public advisory committee (Blackfoot Recreation Steering Committee) to help guide the agency in the management of the river. The Committee is composed of private landowners, recreationists, anglers, angling and whitewater outfitters, and representatives from FWP, BLM, USFS, DNRC. One of the recommendations resulting from the scoping meetings and the Recreation Steering Committee was a need to increase access points to the Blackfoot River. Areas of focus were near Lincoln, the Scotty Brown Bridge area, and the lower Blackfoot River. At the

time of these discussions, the subject tracts were open for public use and assumed to continue in that capacity. The proposed acquisitions would ensure that these tracts remain open for future generations and anticipated increases in angling and recreational use. The proposed action is consistent with recommendations by the Recreation Steering Committee and the recognition of access needed on the lower Blackfoot River.

The FWP Region 2 Six-Year Plan identifies a need for additional access sites on the Blackfoot River, Lower Clark Fork and Bitterroot Rivers to generally complete a network of accesses in the Region. The proposed action is also consistent with these plans.

Benefits

The subject tracts have been used by the public for years to access the Blackfoot River. If acquired by FWP, these tracts and about 4,000 feet of river frontage (total) will remain open to the public for angling and recreation. This stretch of the Blackfoot River receives over 38,000 visitor days in the summer due to its fishery resource, water based recreational opportunities, aesthetics and proximity to Missoula (*FWP 2002 Blackfoot River Use Estimation Final Report*). Formal management and signing of these tracts will aid the public in finding access and help to distribute use throughout the lower recreation corridor. Loss of these tracts for public access would result in increased use at the remaining sites, increase user conflicts, reduced quality and quantity of angling and recreational opportunities. Replacement sites are not available.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative A: No Action

Plum Creek Timberlands is ready to dispose of the Weigh Station tract and MDT is ready to dispose of its recreational management responsibilities at Angevine Park. If MDT discharges the easement held on Angevine Park, Plum Creek would have a marketable tract. If FWP does not acquire the fee title or easement associated with the parcels, it is likely that the parcels will be sold on the private market. The appraisal completed by Norman C. Wheeler and Associates in 2002 identified the highest and best use as recreational homesites. Although some private landowners allow angling pedestrian access through their residential property, seldom do they allow general recreational use of their property. Liability and maintenance costs are prohibitive, as well as the loss of privacy within small tracts of 6-8 acres.

This said, Weigh Station and Angevine Park would likely be closed to the public if sold to the private sector for individual use. These tracts have been used by the public for decades. If closed, the other recreation sites upstream would become overcrowded and

suffer from heavy use. Vegetation will be further degraded; health and safety may become serious issues. User conflicts would increase as more people crowd along limited shorelines and float fewer reaches of river. Loss of these tracts for public use would eliminate an access to Plum Creek land across the river, as well, for uses such as hunting or hiking.

Surveys since 1992 indicate that more people are recreating in a variety of ways, not just the traditional fishing and hunting. The lower reach of the Blackfoot River provides access and river frontage to accommodate those varying activities. Public shoreline and land access along these “blue ribbon” rivers is more important to visitors and Montana residents than ever before.

Alternative B: Acquisition of Weigh Station only.

Alternative B does ensure continued access to the river at one location. Purchase of Weigh Station would ensure public access for the future. As the last floater take-out prior to the Stimson Mill operations, this is an important access site for recreationists and anglers. It has also been an important site to the FWP Wildlife Division for over 40 years to collect data from hunters in the Blackfoot River Drainage.

It is unlikely that maintaining public access at this site alone will adequately accommodate future public use and maintain public and environmental health. As with the No Action Alternative, if FWP only acquires one tract, displaced visitors will move to the remaining sites on the lower Blackfoot River. Sites will become overused, suffer more environmental degradation, and visitor conflicts will rise. Health and sanitation may become a larger issue at these highly used sites.

After MDT discharges the highway easement, FWP acquisition of Weigh Station would be subject to approval by the FWP Commission, the Montana Land Board and NPS. Management of the tract would be assumed by FWP Region 2 Parks staff and an existing FAS caretaker.

Alternative C: Easement transfer of Angevine Park only.

Angevine Park would be less costly initially with the existing recreational/highway related use easement transferred from MDT to FWP. This site provides easier access off the highway and better parking facilities than at Weigh Station due to the infrastructure already in place. However, paved roads are a higher level of development than typical FASs and could be more costly to repair/replace in the long term.

This site alone, is not expected to adequately accommodate the public use and maintain public and environmental health.

Alternative C would be completed via similar processes as proposed in Preferred Alternative D, below. The FWP Lands Division would complete transfer of Angevine Park with the appropriate agency. Management of the tract would be assumed by FWP Region 2 Parks staff and an existing FAS caretaker.

Preferred Alternative D: Proposed Action - FWP to acquire Weigh Station by fee title and accept the transfer of easement assigned to Angevine Park from MDT.

The proposed alternative ensures continued access to the lower Blackfoot River for thousands of visitors annually. The risk of losing public access at these tracts is very high if FWP passes on this opportunity. The potential of gaining new public access in this reach of the lower Blackfoot River is very low. These tracts are popular with the public and have historically been used by the public. Studies indicate that the type of river use has expanded from traditional bank and float fishing to include a variety of other types of recreation. Activities such as swimming, wading, picnicking, inner-tubing and floating unrelated to angling make high use of the proposed tracts. People participating in these activities want shoreline access and short float distances, as have been historically been allowed by use of the Plum Creek tracts.

Note: A detailed evaluation of the Proposed Action is included in Part VI. Environmental Review Checklist beginning on page 18.

The Preferred Alternative C would be completed by the FWP Lands Division to complete the necessary acquisition and transfer. In addition, the FWP Land and Water Conservation Fund Coordinator would help complete and submit an application for federal aid to the National Park Service (NPS) requesting matching funds for the purchase of Weigh Station. Matching funds would be provided by the FWP Fishing Access Site program funded by angler license dollars (see #9b of Part I above). The acquisition would be subject to approval by the FWP Commission, the Montana State Land Board and NPS.

Management of the tract would fall to FWP Region 2 Parks staff and the existing Blackfoot River FAS caretaker.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

FWP and Missoula County have established weed management programs. FWP Region 2 would incorporate the new tracts into the weed plan to combat weeds, primarily knapweed, found on the tracts. Weed abatement by FWP will enhance biodiversity and the ability of native species to stabilize the tract.

If health and sanitation become a concern in the future, FWP may consider installing a latrine at each tract.

If visitation and traffic/parking patterns observed within Weigh Station seem unsafe in the future, FWP may consider installing a formal entrance, road and parking areas typical of other FASs in the state. This development would be contingent upon public comment, cultural approval, and funding.

If cultural sites are present on the tracts, they will be afforded greater protection under the State Antiquities Act. The new tracts would undergo a cultural survey and the State Historic Preservation Office would be consulted prior to any future development. At this time, the tracts are proposed to remain as is, without improvements.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

FWP is the logical agency to acquire and manage the proposed tracts. Plum Creek Timberlands has allowed public access at Weigh Station due to a company philosophy allowing public use of all of their lands; however, this tract no longer helps to fulfill their goals. MDT no longer wishes to manage Angevine Park. The easement granted to the state for Angevine Park limits its use to highway related or recreation-type activities. MDT does not have the resources to manage it as a recreation area. Residential development on the subject parcels would greatly jeopardize the public access to these areas.

As steward of Montana's fish, wildlife and park related sites, FWP must assess the number and location of accesses open to the public for related purposes and the need for additional access. Public use of the subject tracts for over 20 years, and various studies, scoping meetings, and existing management observations of the area during that time, indicate that the proposed tracts offer valuable public access. According to an FWP survey conducted in 2002, Reach 6 (Johnsrud Park Fishing Access Site to Bonner, Montana) of the Blackfoot River received 38,118 visitor days. This is the most frequently used reach of the Blackfoot River (*2002 Blackfoot River Use Estimation Study*).

The preservation of these tracts can act as a stimulus to the Bonner Community economics as visitors from across the nation meet here during the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. This stretch of the river can more effectively be marketed to the public with formal signage and as part of a system of FASs along the lower river.

The acquisition of Weigh Station and the transfer of easement at Angevine Park reveal few impacts, all minor, and many of which can be mitigated. The transfer from private to state agency ownership assures greater preservation of historic and cultural artifacts and public access to the river. FWP ownership also helps to ensure protection for unique habitats, such as wetlands, floodplains, riparian zones.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Draft EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- One legal notice in each of these papers: *Helena Independent Record*, *Missoulian*,
- One press release;
- Public Notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.state.mt.us>

Copies of the EA will be delivered directly to the neighboring landowners to ensure their knowledge of the proposed action. Other possibly interested parties will be notified of the availability of the EA by a mailed postcard.

The opportunities for public input listed above are adequate for the proposed action, since few negative environmental impacts are identified.

- 2. Duration of comment period, if any.**

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days following the publication of the legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until **5:00 p.m.,** **_____ date _____, 2003** and can be mailed to the address below:

Blackfoot River FAS Acquisitions – Weigh Station and Angevine Park
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Or email comments to: lbastian@state.mt.us

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?**
NO
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

This environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis. Acquiring the property poses few minor impacts and substantial benefit to the local natural and human environment. The EA process provides adequate protection and opportunity for public review and comment for this action.

2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Sue Dalbey	Allan Kuser	Lee Bastian
Independent Contractor	Fishing Access Site Coordinator	Region 2 Parks Manager
Dalbey Resources	FWP	FWP
926 N. Lamborn St.	PO Box 200701	3201 Spurgin Road
Helena, MT 59601	Helena, MT 59620-0701	Missoula, MT 59804
406-443-8058	406-444-7885	406-542-5517

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Wildlife Division
Fisheries Division
Lands Division
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Montana Department of Transportation
Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P.

PART VI. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1a. The proposed action is to acquire the tracts by fee title or transfer of easement, upon which they would be managed as undeveloped sites. No impacts to soil stability or geologic substructure are anticipated from this level of action.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a. Due to the historic public use of these tracts, the change in ownership proposed is not expected to cause additional visitation or resulting air pollutants from vehicles accessing the tracts. Other types of non-motorized recreation allowed on the tracts or river would not decrease air quality.

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**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)			X			3l.
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3a. Continuation of historical public use at these tracts are not expected to alter water quality.

3l. Both tracts include a portion of the floodplain and will be protected by statewide floodplain regulations under state ownership/easement holding.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?			X			4f.
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4e. Knapweed occurs on the tracts. Weeds will be removed in accordance with the revised Region 2 Weed Management Plan and Missoula County Weed Board, using mechanical, chemical or biological methods.

4f. This area is not considered unique farmlands, though wetlands are likely to occur along the river. The tracts have not been surveyed for wetlands since the lands will be afforded wetland protection under state ownership and federal laws, and no construction is planned on these tracts.

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				5g.
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				5h.
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish and Wildlife (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

The Blackfoot River is renowned for its fishery resources. It is an angler's destination in search of rainbow trout, brown trout, mountain whitefish, northern pike and Westslope cutthroat. Cutthroat trout are a species of concern in Montana due to the rarity of pure populations and anglers must release fish caught. Bull trout also inhabit the river, but it is illegal to intentionally fish for them due to classification as a threatened species under the US Fish and Wildlife Threatened and Endangered Act.

Nongame fish species include longnose dace, northern pike minnow, sculpins, largescale sucker, and peamouth.

FWP angler estimates indicate that an average of 17,000 angler days occur on the Blackfoot River over the last 6 years. The lower reach of the river ranks seventh in the region in popularity. Region 2 Fisheries Manager Pat Saffel indicated to Sue Dalbey (personal communication September 4, 2003) that recreational use in the lower reach has been increasing. If the Recreation Steering Committee recommendations are implemented to manage the upper reaches in a more restrictive manner to

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

maintain pristine experiences, and the lower river reaches are managed at a less restrictive level, then the lower Blackfoot River reaches would continue to see high use.

Wildlife Biologist Bob Henderson confirmed to Sue Dalbey (personal communication September 9, 2003) that existing human use of the proposed tracts precludes significant use by wildlife. Several species use the tracts and to access or cross the river and highway area, but habitat is not of a quality on the tracts to provide substantial protection or food. Henderson did indicate, however, that retaining the tracts as public access areas would be more beneficial than use as residential home sites which would impede animal crossings. In addition, the peak summer use by humans is during a time when wildlife is not heavily using the river bottom areas. These tracts are more used for wildlife winter range when human activity is lower.

No threatened or endangered species would be impacted by continued public use of the area. This stretch of the river may be considered a linkage zone for species such as grizzly bear and wolves. The canyon area may be considered a lynx zone and mountain lion habitat. Deer and bighorn sheep are often seen killed by automobiles on the highway, which would attract these species. Black bear and bald eagles are in the area. Eagles will cruise the river corridor; no nests occur on or near the proposed tracts. The river corridor has potential as peregrine falcon habitat; however, the subject tracts would not provide the cliff-type terrain required for nesting.

Henderson indicated that the Wildlife Division has used Weigh Station for collecting data from hunters in the Blackfoot Drainage for over 40 years. This continuous string of data is important for understanding trends in wildlife populations. The tract offers space to route many vehicles and is highly visible and accessible from the highway, thus hunters are inclined to stop at the check station. It is unknown where this information would be collected if this tract would be unavailable in the future.

These tracts also provide a public access point where hunters or hikers could cross the river onto other lands allowing public use (Plum Creek Timberlands).

5g. Because these tracts are already known as public access sites, acquisition by FWP is not expected to increase visitation or human related stress to wildlife above what is already occurring.

5h. Threatened or endangered species that occur in this area include: bald eagle, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, wolves. These species are not expected to be further impacted by the continued public use of these tracts. From a wildlife management perspective, continued public access, which tends to be used only seasonally by humans, is preferred to housing development on these tracts.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Effects (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a.
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Use (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. The proposed action will continue the existing land use as public access for recreational and angling purposes. If sold to a private party for residential homesites, the existing land use would likely cease to exist.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X		yes	8d.
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8a. The FWP Region 2 Weed Management Plan calls for an integrated method of managing weeds, including the use of herbicides. The use of weed controlling chemicals will be in compliance with application guidelines and by people trained in safe handling techniques to limit the possibility of an accidental spill. Weeds could also be controlled using mechanical or biological means in certain areas to reduce the risk of chemical spills.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Impact (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify: <u>public maintenance, solid waste disposal</u>			X		yes	10a.
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. These tracts will be maintained in a undeveloped nature for the near future and therefore the increase in governmental services will minimally increase. Services will primarily transfer from MDT to FWP. By assuming management responsibilities of these tracts, FWP will see an increase in site patrol for litter and unauthorized activities. A pack-in/pack-out policy is common at FASs across the state, as would be the case at these tracts. A caretaker position is in place for many other Blackfoot River sites owned by FWP and these tracts can easily be incorporated into the route and position duties.

10b. FWP makes payments to counties in lieu of taxes for FASs owned in that county; assessments are equal to taxes assessed to private lands (unless the agency owns less than 100 acres in that county, 87-1-603, MCA, under which circumstances lands are exempt).

10e. These tracts will not directly generate any revenue, though they provide access to anglers who purchase fishing licenses. A portion of every fishing license is appropriated to fund FAS acquisitions, operations and maintenance. Parks and recreation related funds come from a variety of sources to fund operations and maintenance.

10f. Maintenance costs in the present undeveloped state of these tracts will be minimal and will come from the FWP Region 2 budget. It is estimated that about \$700 annually will be needed to

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combat weeds, maintain signs and fences at the two tracts. By incorporating the tracts into an existing position with similar duties in the vicinity of these tracts, an additional 0.03 FTE is estimated necessary in the near future to pick up litter, repair or replace signs and other maintenance of the tracts. Because of the existing public use for angling and recreation, a large increase in enforcement efforts is not expected by the change in ownership.

** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

The Blackfoot River traverses a beautiful valley with meadow areas and narrow canyons interspersed through out its 132 miles. The proximity to Missoula and location relative to three other major population centers within the state make it a popular destination point or stop-over enroute between these centers. The angling and recreation opportunities are high on the list of most Montanans as an essential quality of life; i.e. these aspects are why people live in Montana.

11c. While the acquisition of these tracts by FWP will not alter the historical and existing use of these tracts, it will ensure the continued public access to these tracts. The proposed action will ensure that the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities remain at levels that accommodate the public demand.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				12d.
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

12a. No site development is planned at this time; therefore, the tracts will not be altered, nor will cultural sites, if any, be altered by a change in ownership or management.

12d. Concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office has not been requested at this time because transferring private property into state agency ownership affords greater protection to historic and cultural resources than when under private ownership, and no construction is planned at this time.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

Due to the historic use of these tracts by the public, past surveys and multi-factional team planning, this project is expected to have wide public support.

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- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

ATTACHMENT A
23-1-110 MCA Exemption Form
Lower Blackfoot River FAS Acquisitions – Weigh Station & Angevine Park

Use this form when a park improvement or development project meets the criteria identified in 12.8.602 (1) ARM, but determined to NOT significantly change park features or use patterns.

State Park or Fishing Access Site Project Description:

Acquire two tracts along the lower Blackfoot River to include in the Fishing Access Site program:

1. Purchase the Weigh Station 6-acre tract by fee title from Plum Creek Timberlands, L.P. using license fees and Land and Water Conservation Fund federal aid.
2. Accept no fee transfer of highway easement interest on the Angevine Park 8-acre tract from Montana Department of Transportation restricted to use for certain highway improvements, parking sites, roadway campgrounds and recreational areas.

The project does not significantly change park or fishing access site features or use patterns.

Reason for exemption is provided across from the appropriate item below.

12.8.602 (ARM) (1)	Reason for Exemption
(a) Roads/trails	no new roads/trails
(b) Buildings	no new buildings
(c) Excavation	none
(d) Parking	no new parking
(e) Shoreline alterations	none
(f) Construction into water bodies	none
(g) Construction w/impacts on cultural artifacts	none
(h) Underground utilities	no new utilities
(i) Campground expansion	None – day use only

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

Some activities considered that do not significantly impact site features or use patterns are: signing, fencing, barriers, road grading, garbage collection, routine latrine and facility maintenance.

Signature_____ (Susan E. Dalbey) _____ Date_ 9/08/03 _____

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.